

NYT

Missile System Termed Wasteful

The writer, Provost of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was science adviser to President Kennedy.

To the Editor:

It is ironic that on June 19, when tens of thousands of Americans were massing at the Lincoln Memorial to focus attention on America's cities and its poor, a determined group of Senators was arguing that it was more important to waste over \$900 million as a down payment on a senseless and totally unnecessary antiballistic missile system, the so-called Sentinel defense against China.

I have always been baffled by the logic which acknowledges, on the one hand, that the United States strategic power is adequate to deter a Soviet missile attack, but, on the other hand, that it still makes sense to build a defense against a much weaker China.

I am even more baffled to find that the Senate proponents of Sentinel are now arguing in its favor, not just for its anti-Chinese capabilities but as a first step toward an anti-Soviet defense.

I am puzzled that their views find any support, in view of the clear deficiencies of Sentinel and the generally admitted virtual impossibility of ever achieving a really effective antimissile defense against the Russians. The questionable value of the Sentinel system is implicit in the puzzling Administration offer not to build this anti-Chinese system if the Soviet Union would agree not to build its A.B.M. system.

McNamara's Argument

In announcing the Sentinel decision last September, Secretary McNamara made a convincing case against deploying an antimissile system against the U.S.S.R., arguing that they would certainly compensate for our A.B.M. by building countermeasures into their strategic offensive missile force and by adding to their numbers, thereby setting off a costly and wasteful new armaments race.

He noted at the time that four Presidential science advisers, myself included, had recommended against the deployment of an anti-Soviet system for just that reason. He did not add—perhaps because his excellent case against the anti-Soviet A.B.M. was followed by an endorsement of the anti-Chinese Sentinel—that I equally emphatically opposed the Sentinel as well.

I did so then, and do so now, because if it were effective at all it would be only for a very short time, and I believed that it would be only a matter of time before the pressures would develop to expand Sentinel into a very costly and clearly inadequate anti-Soviet system. The current Senate debate shows that those pressures have already begun.

Sentinel itself is already technically obsolete; it is based on a several-year-old design. Many of the components are essentially obsolete in the light of new radar and missile technology.

Countersystem Developed

Historically, by the time a defensive system is supposedly perfected, the offense has long since developed a means of overcoming it. For this reason we have until now repeatedly deferred the deployment of one antimissile system after another, until political pressures a year ago evidently persuaded the Administration that it would be best to forestall a possible Republican accusation that we were on the short end of a new missile gap by throwing out the sop of Sentinel.

If Sentinel won't work as intended, and if a larger system will be even less effective against Russian missiles, leading only to an expanded arms race at great cost and with no improvement to national security, it is silly to waste a penny on it. We desperately need money to apply to badly neglected and more urgent problems at home.

I very much hope that the Senate will see the folly of such a grievous misallocation of resources as Sentinel represents.

JEROME B. WIESNER

Falmouth, Mass., June 21, 1968
An editorial on this subject appears today.

STANFORD UNIV.—DEPT. GENETICS

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